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# A Renewed Focus On Cyber Security

By **Olivia Winslow**  
STAFF WRITER

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In a time when terrorism concerns have invaded the American consciousness as never before, the New York Institute of Technology has created a center on computer security, providing the sort of focus that experts say is needed to shore up a system vulnerable to attacks that could wreak havoc on vital industries.

"It's been known for a long time that, for various reasons, computer security is not where it needs to be," said Marty Lindner of the federally funded Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Center at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. CERT takes reports on Internet security breaches and offers troubleshooting. According to CERT statistics, 82,094 security incidents were reported last year, up nearly 30,000 from the year before. "Those are the numbers that people chose to report to us," Lindner added. "There's a lot that goes unreported."

He continued, "We need to have more people trained in the proper way to write [computer] code, No. 1, and the proper way to deploy and administer solutions if we're going to have a secure Internet. Universities and other organizations need to start paying more ... [attention] to cyber security so we can start defending ourselves."

NYIT is looking to do just that by establishing its new Center for Network and Information Security with a \$300,000 federal grant it was recently awarded with the help of Rep. Steve Israel (D-Dix Hills).

NYIT is developing a computer security curriculum for students, by providing a concentration in computer security within its existing computer science major, as well as a certificate program for working professionals. Two courses were unveiled last month with the start of the spring semester and more are planned. Heskia Heskiaoff, dean of NYIT's School of Engineering and Technology who will oversee the center, said the college, which has campuses in Old Westbury, Central Islip and Manhattan, also plans to collaborate with local industry and governments on research projects.

"Our objective is to provide more expertise in computer security for local industry," Heskiaoff said. "All companies are concerned about computer security, especially after September 11."

Paul Stirpe, a computer science associate professor at the college, said the center's focus will combine course work with hands-on experience in a laboratory, allowing students to study Internet traffic, assess vulnerabilities and propose solutions.

The problem for many is, Stirpe said, "You don't know how vulnerable you are until it's too late. Security is not well-funded until a serious breach occurs." One such breach, he noted, was the Melissa virus, which disrupted e-mail systems around the globe in 1999 and caused an estimated \$80 million in damage to U.S. businesses.

Israel, a member of the House of Representatives' science committee, said the

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importance of computer security was clear. "Computer viruses cost our economy \$13 billion" in 2000 alone, he said.

"We're extraordinarily vulnerable to cyber attacks by terrorists," Israel added. "Every aspect of our lives revolves around computers. An attack could disrupt planes, nuclear power plants, water supplies."

Congress recognized those vulnerabilities when, last year, it authorized spending \$900 million over five years for computer and network security research and development. Higher education institutions, among others, are in line to receive some of those funds once appropriations bills are passed.

Congress concluded in a recent report that the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks "brought into stark relief the nation's physical and economic vulnerability to an attack within our borders." Congress worried about the "porous fabric of the U.S.'s network infrastructure that leaves the nation open to the constant possibility of cyber attack."

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